CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE CAMEROON HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY DEFINITION: A HISTORICAL APPRAISAL

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Introduction

The subject of cultural diversity in education has attracted considerable research interest with varying focal points that form the sustenance of this paper. Meier and Hartell (2009, 180) have argued that increasing cultural diversity in educational institutions necessitates that educationists teach and manage learners with cultures, languages and backgrounds that are unknown to them. Du Toit (1995) focusing on the Republic of South Africa takes the view that the opening of schools to all races does not automatically ensure mutual understanding and acceptance between educators and learners and amongst learners themselves. The assertion here is that desegregation *per se* does not lead to predictable and meaningful attitudinal changes of groups to each other and can, in actual fact, lead to the heightening of tension and prejudices within the South African context. O'Neill (2009, 81) sees multicultural education as a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. He asserts that multicultural education challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and societies and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic and gender, among other things) that students, their communities, and teachers represent. In her research on teaching and learning in two desegregated South African high schools, Van Heerden (1998, 110) asserts

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that the process of desegregation in these schools is primarily a case of assimilating black learners into the school and its culture, with the result that the *status quo* is kept intact.

To Burridge and Chodkiewicz (2008), educational institutions, including schools and the academy, must engage in the debates about representations of ethno-cultural diversity, nationhood and identity. According to them, institutions of learning must help to shape these discourses in order to assist civic leaders and policy makers to work with communities to build civil societies based on principles of social justice, equity and social inclusion (Burridge and Chodkiewicz 2008, 14). Their emphasis is that Professional educators, in particular, need to focus their attention on the roles they play in converting the challenges of ethno-cultural diversity into opportunities for all children and young people. These authors converge to the imperatives of multiculturalism in educational policy. They, however, express frustrations on the practise of multiculturalism in education. It is within this frame that this paper resituates the context within which cultural diversity was given consideration in the definition of higher education policy in Cameroon. The paper argues that efforts to sustain reforms that could harness bicultural education at the tertiary level in Cameroon were marred by the problem of diversity in interest by educational stakeholders orchestrated by resource inadequacies.

Cultural Diversity in Cameroon's Educational Context

Educational policy in Cameroon, like elsewhere in Africa, developed from colonial cultures which the African people inherited from their colonial masters. In the case of Cameroon, a bilingual system evolved from the system of colonial administration in which the country developed from 1884 to 1960. It is worth noting that the country was colonised by the Germans in 1884. In 1916, the Germans were ousted from the territory in the course of the First World War by a combined Anglo-French effort. The victorious powers, after a failed condominium, opted to partition the territory for effective wartime administration. According to the terms of the partition, Britain got 1/5 of the territory composed of two discontinuous strips of land of about 90,000 km^2 while France got 4/5 corresponding to about 400,000 km^2 (Echu 2004, 21). These terms were accepted by the post war settlement at Paris out of which was born the League of Nations that was given the mandate to oversee the administration of former vanquish territories. Cameroon being one therefore became a mandated territory under Britain and France. The two portions

of the territory were administered from the cultural background of the administering authorities. At the end of the Second World War, the United Nations' Trusteeship Council took over the responsibilities of the Mandate Commission. Thus, it was within the brackets of the Trusteeship Council that independence was granted to French Cameroon. In the case of British Cameroon, independence was obtained through a UN organised plebiscite whose results implicated loss of British Northern Cameroon to Nigeria while British Southern Cameroon reunited with French Cameroon to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon with a bi-cultural constitution that adopted a bilingual status.

The bilingual status adopted by Cameroon at independence was expressed, among other aspects, through the educational sector according to which two sub-systems of education emerged (English for West Cameroon and French for East Cameroon) at the elementary and secondary levels. For the provision of higher education suitable for the specific needs and realities of the newly independent nation, the federal government established a University Complex in 1961, known as the National Institute for University Studies (*Institute National d'Etudes Universitaires*).

The Institute's activities started in October 1961 with the assistance of the French Government. Its mandate was to prepare students for degrees in Education, Law, Economics and the Arts. Professional training programmes were developed at the same time through the School of Administration, School of Agriculture and the Military Academy. In 1962 the National Institute for University Studies evolved into the Federal University of Cameroon, created to take over the role of training senior cadres in Science, Education and Technology (ADEA 1999, 2). The influence of French presence in the country led to the adoption of the binary system of traditional universities and specialised institutions expressed in French as *grandes écoles*. This system was meant to serve both the English and French-Speaking Cameroonians (Ngwana 2001). This cultural melange became the bases of evolving problems of diversity as the state, while implementing a bi-cultural policy of education, failed to take into consideration the link between language and learning. It was this foiled link as the paper observes, that laid bases for frustrations among those who could not survive in the existing system.

Along similar lines, other establishments were created and attached to the University of Yaoundé by 1967 among which were: the University Centre for Health Sciences (CUSS) and the Institute of Management – *Institut de l'Administration des Entreprises* (IAE) in 1969, *Ecole Supérieure Internationale de Journalisme de Yaoundé* (ESIJY) in 1970, the Institute of International Relations (*Institut des Relations Internationales de Yaoundé*) and the National

Advanced School of Engineering (*Ecole Nationale Supérieure Polytechnique* – ENSP) in 1971 (ADEA 1999, 2). Both the classical faculties and the specialised institutions were all classified as bilingual universities; what Maríe Torres-Guzman (2002) refers to as individual bilingualism which occurs where an institution offers tuition in two languages to the same individual. Considering the demographic superiority of French-speaking Cameroon, they formed a majority of the teaching staff in all these institutions of higher learning. This became the first educational barrier to enhancing cultural diversity, as students who emerged from the Anglo-Saxon styled pre-tertiary education recorded poor performances and low graduate rates which they blamed on language disparity and began pressing for reform in the higher education system.

Higher Education Policy Shifts in Cameroon

The Cameroon university system like others in Africa was faced with a number of policy demands from their very inceptions. It should be noted at this instance that the Cameroon higher education policy was primarily formulated to train national cadres for senior positions in the civil service which was and remain the major employer in Cameroon. According to Chan et al. (2014, 5), higher education provision should take into consideration a wide range of competency and generic skills that includes but are not limited to communication skills, problem-solving skills, self-directed learning skills, the ability to integrate ideas and concepts, and the capacity to work in teams and group environments. Thus, in crafting the Cameroon higher educational policy, policy makers did not adequately consider the prerogative of adapting the policy to suit the needs of Cameroon and Cameroonian students in particular (Chan et al. 2014).

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2012, 11) identified three goals students should develop by the completion of a U.S. bachelor's degree: (1) be informed by knowledge about the natural and social worlds, (2) be empowered through the mastery of intellectual and practical skills, and (3) be responsible for their personal actions and for civic values. Therefore, the efforts to enhance cultural diversity in the higher education policy making in Cameroon did not adequately integrate the needs for mass education which it opted for and excellence which could translate graduates into self-confident and civic responsible persons empowered by the acquisition/mastery of intellectual knowledge and practical skills since learners were deprived of the opportunity of adequate learning within

the cultural diversity enhancement policy. This need for mass education in Cameroon is illustrated by the fact that when the Federal University of Cameroon opened its doors in 1962, it had an intake of 600 students. This figure rose to 7,000 in 1970, 18,000 in 1984, 32,000 in 1990, 45,000 in 1991 and over 50,000 in 1992 (MINESUP 1993). This rising intake jeopardised excellence and expansionist efforts were made to redress the situation.

At the start of the 1977/78 academic year, the University of Yaoundé comprised ten organisational units comprising of: three faculties, four schools, one specialised centre and two institutes. In spite of this, the student population was rising above infrastructure and staffing viability, orchestrating numerous deficiencies among which was that of language use drawn from the linguistically diverse nature of the country. To address the problem of student numerical explosion, four University Centres were created in 1977 with specific educational mandates: Buea University Centre for languages, translation/ interpretation, and the arts; Douala University Centre for Business Studies and the training of technical education teachers; Dschang University Centre for Agricultural Sciences; Ngaoundere University Centre for Food Science and Food Technology (ADEA 1999, 5). Unfortunately, these centres and specialised institutions could not solve the problem of overcrowding considering that entry positions were few and competitive; based on recruitment opportunities in the public service (Ngwana 2001, 2). Linguistically, a holistic policy to ensure effective teaching through adequate use of both official languages was not taken into consideration. While this was a positive evolution in the higher education training capacity, policy disregarded the problem of lingual diversity among the students these institutions were to train. The result was the feeling of being discriminated among students who could not meet language demands.

The problem of student-lecturer ratio and congestion posed the problem of success rates which in 1992 stood at 30% resulting from congested lecture rooms and linguistic diversity. Within this context the numerical superiority of French-speaking lecturers made things worse as marginalisation was decried by English-speaking students who were disfavoured by the policy of individual bilingualism (Echu 2004, 26). According to Tambi (1973) and Njeck (1992), at the University of Yaounde, 80% of lectures were delivered in French and only 20% in English. In the midst of these disparities, it became common for English-speaking students to blame poor results to the fact that the professors lacked the linguistic competence to properly understand and correct scripts in their second language (Tambi 1973, 38; Njeck 1992, 41). Such cleavages provoked the rise of a series of strikes from English-speaking students which Konings (2004, 174) has termed; "Anglophone nationalist

struggle". As a result of these pressures and other weaknesses suffered by the system, the Cameroon university system was reformed. This reformation gave birth to five additional universities out of which three were made to practise individual bilingualism and the two others were unilingual.

The Diversification of University Models

In response to students' pressure emanating from demographic as well as linguistic difficulties in learning, the state decided in 1993 to reform the inherited higher education policy. In this process, two sorts of universities were established in Cameroon: the bilingual and the monolingual universities.

The Establishment of Bilingual Universities and Emanating Policy Pitfalls

Within the higher education context, the Cameroon educational system adopted a policy of individual bilingualism rather than an integral approach that could generate the interest of nationals into putting bilingualism in practice. Ayafor (2005, 133) asserts that two languages became official languages in Cameroon as a bequeathed colonial policy acclaimed by decision makers at the time of reunification in 1961. These languages were thought to be neutral (considering the existence of a multiplicity of indigenous languages), thus, suitable for the typical political objective of holding the two English and French cultures together. This view illustrates that the need for the integration of the bicultural nation through bilingualism was not intended to be an educational linguistic policy worthy of being defined and pursued in linguistic principles. This is because the bilingual principles seem to have concentrated more on the political integrity of the nation with insignificant considerations (if any) on educational outcomes. Based on the nation's policy makers' objectives of bilingualism; efforts to attain unity in diversity did not receive any reasonable attention in the educational sector which could contextually boast academics. This view is emphasised by Echu (1999) in the following words:

> *En préférant ainsi le français et l'anglais, les autorités camerounaises ont été sûrement influencées par les mêmes critères ayant motivé le choix des deux langues au lendemain des indépendances: résoudre le problème de plurilinguisme existant dans le pays, préserver l'unité nationale dans une nouvelle fédération encore fragile, continuer la politique coloniale en matière de politique linguistique.*

Thus the high concentration on integrative politics in Cameroon exposed leadership to the risk of establishing half-baked language policies in the academia which was not sustained by staff balance such as described by Ngwana (2001, 3):

> Bilingualism as a language policy in the university was not effective since teaching was carried out predominantly in French thereby creating a situation of imbalance between the two languages. The English-speaking students increasingly felt marginalised because this situation also caused them to register very high rates of failure in examinations.

The maintenance of the policy of individual bilingualism had the result that French-speaking lecturers continued to take a bulk of the lectures due to their numerical superiority. Considering their own secondary and high school background as the French subsystem, most of them were largely inapt to deliver lectures as well as evaluate in English. Thus, students who graduated from the English subsystem of education recorded low success rates and consequently dropped out. The problem of French language dominance was further compounded by that of library facilities. With about 80% French-speaking lecturers it can be assumed, mean approximately the same percentage of documents in French in the university libraries. Within this context, the efforts to resolve problems of cultural diversity through the establishment of bilingual higher education structures failed to effectively respond to educational necessities. This was largely a result of non-consideration of imperative principles that could boost effectiveness in bilingual universities.

According to Langner and Imbach (2000), there exist two principles that are imperative for the establishment of a bilingual university, namely: (a) sensitivity to the cultural and linguistic situation of the region, and (b) developing a concept of bilingualism. To them, the first principle ensures that the appropriate language and cultural balance are maintained and promotional principles which include: the promotion of participation by a linguistic minority (where applicable). The second principle ensures that all learners are able to learn (Langner & Imbach 2000, 467). These basic principles were frustrated by the policy of mass education according to which all learners who had successfully completed secondary school were directly qualified to study in the universities. The result was overcrowded lecture rooms making it difficult for lecturers to be student centred; that is if the lecturer was able to manage linguistic diversity. Thus, the language diversity weakness among students and lecturers barred the chances of employing the promotional principles as cited above.

With the effect that there was no policy definition to guide teaching towards the application of linguistically integrating principle, lecturers taught in the language they mastered and evaluated as such. This was consequent to failure in the bilingual policy that was intended to enhance 'unity in diversity' and inspired what Echu like Konings describe as Anglophone Nationalism characterised by the struggle for equality in learning opportunities (Echu 2004, 2). Unfortunately, the inability of policy-makers to immediately redress the situation due to lack of necessary staff instigated widespread discontent among English-speaking Cameroonians, who felt abandoned in the existing status quo and resorted to strikes. In the course of such strikes, the academic environment became unsafe as demonstrating students scared even the administrative staff, resulting in the occupation of the campus by forces of the law and order as it occurred in 1983, 1991, 1992 and 1993. Given these circumstances, the bilingual status of the country and of the academic system which would have served the greater interest of the nation through inculcating civic responsibility among students rather became a basis for which an identity bloc developed to challenge the status quo resulting in disruptions in academic programs.

The development of an identity bloc reflects Echu's (2004, 25) argument that "The Anglophones have remained very jealous about maintaining their geographical territory within the Cameroon state". This, they did by trying to retain the cultural aspects which colonialism bequeathed to them such as the English language and an Anglo-Saxon styled education. It was in this context that they decried French language domination and advocated an Anglo-Saxon educational system in the higher education milieu as it existed in the primary and secondary education levels wherein they hoped to guarantee educational opportunities to their offsprings. Their argument was not judgemental, rather it was constitutional, as the 1961 constitution in its article 1, paragraph 2 made provisions for English and French to be official languages in Cameroon with equal status. This was reiterated in article 1, paragraph 3 of the Cameroon Constitution of January 18, 1996. This struggle, among other non-linguistic exigencies such as the problem of overcrowding, definition of teaching staff career and reformulation of the higher education goals, resulted in the establishment of unilingual universities in Cameroon with effect from 1993.

The Establishment of Unilingual Universities and Emanating Policy Pitfalls

The reforms of 1993, apart from reorganising the Cameroon university system, resulted in the raising of five university centres to universities and introduced two unilingual universities. These were the universities of Buea

and Ngaoundere, which were Anglophone and francophone respectively. Presidential decree No 2010/371 of 14 December 2010 raised the Bambili University Centre, which before had become the Higher Teacher Training College (HTTC) and the Higher Technical Teacher Training College (HTTTC) to a university in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. These developments targeted an increment in students' success rates. According to Ngwana (2001), the birth of unilingual universities actually helped in increasing university success rates in the country. Students' success rate which in 1992 stood at 30% in the then university of Yaounde generally observed an increase as in 1995/96, that of the University of Buea was 70%, University of Dschang 48%, and University of Yaounde one 48%. Thus, the reforms did well in shifting success rates upward (Ngwana 2001, 5). Though the reform succeeded in improving success rates, it actually stifled the achievement of unity in diversity, as young learners in the unilingual institutions remained disconnected from their fellow countrymen of the opposite culture.

The increase in success rate was not however directly translated into increase post-university success rates considering that in the professional institutions which till present are the major access routes to public service in Cameroon were French language dominated. In addition to French-speaking staff dominance in these public service institutions, access was a great problem as competitive entrance examinations into institutions like *Ecole Normale d'Enseignement Technique* (ENSET) Douala and the National Advance School of Engineering were often in French language. Therefore, the policy of introducing unilingual universities did not establish any safe haven towards the enhancement of cultural diversity. It is worthy to emphasise here that students' academic efforts are primarily guided by the need to acquire a better job, to earn a good salary, to gain an appreciation of ideas, and to prepare for graduate or professional school (Chan et al. 2004, 8).

The putting in place of unilingual universities, which in addition to traditional faculties were host to public service institutions, had serious imperfections. This is primarily because the public service schools were expected to receive students from all secondary school backgrounds. Consequently, the need for jobs upon graduation spurred students to seek admission into institutions with opposing language policy. Wherever this occurred, the student in question suffered the consequences of language differences already discussed above. As Du Plooy & Swanepoel (1997, 143) put it, "The learner whose home language is different from that of the dominant group at school is often made to feel that his or her home language is a second-rate language. This leads to poor self-esteem among learners". This lowered self-confidence is easily translated to lowered learning outcomes.

Enshrined in the 1993 reform objectives were the need to: Grant universities more academic and management autonomy by providing basic infrastructure and finances; provide a more conducive environment for teaching and research by creating a better atmosphere for teachers; teaching and research and revive as well as maximise inter-university and international co-operation (ADEA 1999, 9). These objectives were conversely challenged through the establishment of unilingual institutions in two instances. In the first, the introduction of universities with autonomy paved the way for university systems privatisation wherein some institutions were made to be unilingual against state policy of "official bilingualism". In the second, teaching and research became rather complex as young researchers who emerged from these unilingual universities had difficulties to exploit research infrastructure outside their language of university training. This did not encourage cooperation between universities of diverse institutional systems and language policy within the same national territory and especially within the limited resources reserved for education by policy-makers.

Another plague to the unilingual system was quality of teaching. As already mentioned, one of the glitches of higher education in Cameroon prior to 1993 was that of imbalance of lecturers between English-speaking and French-speaking resulting principally from demographic differences. This occasioned the problem of drop-outs especially among English-speaking students. The creation of unilingual universities with emphasis on Anglo-Saxon universities exacerbated this problem as lecturers of French expression were still recruited to teach in these universities and in English language. In the case of the University of Bamenda wherein its creation coincided with mass recruitment into the Cameroon public service about one hundred of the one thousand lecturers recruited in the "operation 25000" public service staff in 2011 were posted to the Anglo-Saxon university of Bamenda. Surprisingly, over 60% of these young recruits were French-speaking and were obliged to lecture in English, a language most of them did not master. In this setting, policy strategies to forge bi-culturalism orchestrated setbacks in learning outcomes as lecturers could not even be of aid to the learners' language needs. In addition to learners employing what Meier and Hartell (2009, 189) call language mixing (code switching), which is a situation where a speaker uses one language and changes to another while in the middle of a sentence, lecturers also got involved. This complex situation of language employment to attain communication goals in the university milieu, bi-culturalism as expressed in the Cameroon higher education policy definition left educational outcomes wanting.

Language weakness on the part of the new recruits obliged some of them to adopt coping strategies. In this way, they prepared lecture notes

and simply dictated them to the students. This method of teaching did not establish close contact between the lecturers and the students, which according to Graham Gibbs is a major dimension of high quality learning. Consequently, cognitive academic engagement, which according to the National Student Forum Annual Report of 2010 requires that "lecturers are trained, supported and incentivised to teach well and be able to inspire and challenge", was not attained (Business, Innovation and Skills, 27). In this way, the goal of teaching was not fully reached by lecturers as they were deprived of expressing acquired as well as desired knowledge due to language barriers.

Relative to the foregoing, quality education, which Hawes and Stephens (1990, 11) define as a process that requires "efficiency in meeting the set goals, relevance to human and developmental needs and conditions, something more in relation to the pursuit of excellence and human betterment", to Bandary (2005, 85) encompasses a range of elements including the level of student achievement; the ability and qualification of staff; the effectiveness of teaching, and the relevance of programmes to the needs of students and the nation in an emerging global knowledge economy among others were not satisfactorily attained. In this pursuit of excellence, education requires communication by way of aptly used and understandable language expressed by both learners and trainers. The policy of training as well as staff recruitment within the unilingual context to satisfy a bilingual state policy particularly in the Anglo-saxon Universities of Buea and Bamenda jeopardised quality learning and outcomes. This derives amplification from the need for apt contact which could drive the lecturer from being a transmitter of knowledge to being a mediator in the construction of knowledge. According to Ombe et al. (2009, 93), "This may enable teachers to become agents for fostering the development of social skills and creating a learning environment that will encourage young people to live together and to become responsible citizens".

Conclusion

Embracing a culturally diverse educational system in Cameroon at independence has remained one of the country's areas of insistent call for reforms. At the level of tertiary education, the country emerged from humble beginnings with hopes that cultural inclusion was a panacea that could need two linguistic cultures together at least within the educational sector. However, considering demographic inequalities between the two cultures and the fact that at the primary and secondary levels the educational system was fragmented into the English and the French subsystems with

quite insignificant efforts to ensure the teaching of the different languages in all educational institutions nationwide, the second language generally became a barrier to inclusive learning at the tertiary level. English-speaking Cameroonians with a smaller population suffered a higher implication of this policy pitfall as very few of them qualified to teach in higher institutions of learning. The consequence was an exaggeratedly low success rate for the English-speaking, who received a greater part of their lectures in French language and had their script marked by French-speaking lecturers who on their part had quite little mastery of the English language. These instances provoked demands for unilingual institutions. Apart from the fact that once established these institutions became a disconnection to cultural inclusion, they served as avenues for emphasising colonial differences which marred the policy-makers' integration desires. While these linguistic barriers were not emphasised in such unilingual universities like that of Ngoundere with French as a working language, the emphases in Anglo-Saxon styled institutions were high growing from admission to teaching and learning policies. These emphases generally resulted in increased success rates with quite little imputation on post-school success, considering that job opportunities in the territory are largely in French-speaking Cameroon. Also, the selective system of admission into these Anglo-saxon institutions which contradicted national policy of mass education generally frustrated graduates from secondary schools who could not get admission into a tertiary system of their own as a result of low grades. Consequently, the failure of inclusion in higher education policy definition has benefitted the Anglophone Cameroonian with self-stabbing opportunities wherein efforts to avoid linguistic barriers actually landed graduates from the English subsystem of primary and secondary education with reduced opportunities to study in a tertiary system of their own. Even where this was possible and with the increased academic success rates they stood to benefit, the linguistic barriers to which they were subjected in the unilingual institutions imposed a low post graduate success rate on them resulting largely to the decry of marginalisation.

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ABSTRACT

The Republic of Cameroon has in addition to its multi-ethnic identities; two main identities that developed from her colonial history. These are the English-speaking and the French-speaking identities established through formal education under British and French administration. At independence, the territory adopted a bilingual educational policy with two subsystems of education known as the English and the French subsystems at the primary and secondary levels. At the tertiary level, the first state university was made bilingual based on the country's bicultural nature. This paper investigates cultural diversity as implemented in the tertiary education policy definition. It examines the bases, practices and pitfalls in the consideration of cultural diversity in the Cameroon higher education policy definition. The paper, based on practices in state universities, argues that an effort to introduce and implement a bi-culturally inclusive educational policy in higher education was marred by varying demands orchestrated by diversity. Exploiting and integrated approach to harness the interrelated issues, the paper concludes that in as much as there was the desire on the part of the state to ensure inclusive bilingualism in the higher education system, what was obtained was exclusivism ranging from policy to practise and outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Cultural diversity; English and French; policy; bilingualism.

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